

VitaMin

Vital health information in a minute!

Your Healthy Heart

A healthier heart can improve your circulatory system, increase energy, minimize further damage to other organs, and improve your overall mood and outlook on life. Everyone can help his or her heart by following these two simple steps:

1. Be more physically active.

People who are physically active have a 20% to 50% lower risk of getting high blood pressure than people who are not active.* Being physically active can also lower your total cholesterol level and raise your HDL cholesterol (the "good" cholesterol that does not build up in the arteries).

Try to fit physical activity into your daily routine in small but important ways. Activities like swimming, brisk walking, running and jumping rope are "aerobic" activities that can condition your heart and lungs if done at the right intensity for at least 30 minutes, three to four times a week. If you can't fit a full 30 minutes into your schedule, try to find two 15-minute periods or even three 10-minute periods.

2. Maintain a healthy weight.

As your body weight increases, your blood pressure may rise. Even small amounts of weight loss can make a big difference in helping to prevent high blood pressure. Here's how to eat and get on your way to a lower weight:

- **Low calories, low fat and high fiber.** Because fat is a concentrated source of calories, eating fewer fatty foods will reduce your calorie intake. Foods high in fiber are excellent substitutes. They are lower in calories and also good sources of vitamins and minerals.



- **Limit serving sizes.** It's not just what you eat, but also the amount. To take in fewer calories, you need to limit your portion sizes, especially of high-calorie foods like high-fat meats and cheeses.
- **Choose foods lower in salt and sodium.** Often, if people with high blood pressure cut back on salt and sodium, their blood pressure falls. Cutting back on salt and sodium also helps keep blood pressure from rising.

Your heart will thank you for getting active and fit. As always, check with your doctor before dieting or exercising, especially if you have a health condition. ■

*WebMD.com, 2009.

Save some money – and save your life.

There's more than one reason to take care of your heart. For example, did you know that if Americans reduced their cholesterol levels by 10%, they could cut the incidence of heart disease by as much as 30%? This simple, heart-healthy step would not only improve the quality of life for millions of Americans – it would save us \$42.75 billion each year in related medical expenses.

National Governors Association. NGA Report on Healthy Living. Investing in America's Health. Washington, DC: NGA, 2007.



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